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# RACISM: THEN AND NOW

## *Introduction*

To some, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was a failure. Even before the conference got underway it elicited controversy when negotiators for the meetings described Israel's Zionist heritage as a racist movement. As a result, Canada and the United States expressed their disapproval by sending only junior delegates to the meetings in Durban, South Africa. Next, only a few days into the conference, the United States and Israel opted to remove all their representatives from the summit due to continuing anti-Zionist sentiments. Some countries that did stay for the remainder of the meetings, including Canada and the 15 European Union states, continued to resist attempts by a number of Arab countries to have Israel described as racist. They also struggled to provide a satisfactory response to countries and individuals seeking reparations for the colonial slave trade. In all, it sometimes appeared that a summit intended to work toward abolishing intolerance was creating more discord.

However, not all participants in the World Conference against Racism were so pessimistic. Although the description of Zionism as racism and the disagreement over reparations for slavery received the most attention from North American media, many other issues were discussed at the summit. Some participants described the event as an ambitious attempt to bring together 153 countries in dealing with issues as various as trafficking in human lives, gender discrimination, the treatment of indigenous peoples, and the

maintenance of minority rights. Groups representing Australian Aboriginals, Iranian Kurds, Quechua Indians from Bolivia, Filipino domestic servants in Hong Kong, and the "untouchable" caste from India, to name a few, were at the conference and welcomed the opportunity to have their voices heard. Amnesty International expressed disappointment that the United States and Israel did not stay to discuss the diverse other issues on the table. The conference was extended by one day while the remaining delegates struggled to reach agreement over the final communiqué.

Closer to home, another anti-racism conference was held in the summer of 2001. Nova Scotia's black community hosted a symposium whose theme was "Racism and the Black World Response." Its objective was to assess current anti-racist strategies in the black community and address the influence of global and historical racism on the community. One stunning and sad example of this historical racism against black Canadians occurred in the conference's host city, Halifax. In the 1960s, residents of Africville were forcibly removed from their homes because the city considered their community an eyesore and an embarrassment. Today, former Africville residents are seeking restitution for their past sufferings.

Regrettably, numerous other examples of racism can be found across Canada, both in the past and in the present. For anti-racist educators, however, these parallel stories represent the complex and universal issues of racism.

# RACISM: THEN AND NOW

## *A Plank in Our Eyes?*

Before watching this *News in Review* report, reflect on the following quotations. How are they related to each other?

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” — The Bible, Matthew 7:3-5

“Most countries are happy to denounce what they call the racism of their enemies. But few are willing to accept even a *souçon* of criticism about their own domestic practices.”  
— Thomas Walkom, *The Toronto Star*

### **Stones and Glass Houses**

Now as you watch the report, look for instances when you think these quotations are applicable. Anti-racist educators begin with the premise that we all have racist attitudes to some degree. After you view the report, discuss as a class why you think it is so difficult to admit responsibility in issues as sensitive as racism.

### **Words, Attitudes, Actions**

As you saw in the report, while most people, groups, and nations agree that racism is wrong, there is much disagreement over what constitutes racism, and how to deal with it. Part of the problem might be that racism exists on a continuum that includes both seemingly harmless behaviours as well as decidedly evil actions. Examine the following list.

- racial jokes
- stereotyping
- discrimination
- prejudice
- racism
- scapegoating
- persecution
- genocide

In groups of two or three, research and discuss the meaning of these terms. Using the dictionary if necessary, come up with a definition for each that helps you differentiate between the terms. Write down one example of an individual or national activity that, in your opinion, is evidence of the term. Share your findings with the rest of the class. In your opinion, how might incidents of stereotyping and discriminatory practices contribute to the development of larger acts of persecution? Why do societies or individuals let intolerance occur?

### **Further Discussion**

Some people might even put nationalism on the list above. Why might they consider this term to be in the same category? In your opinion, does it belong on the list?

# **RACISM: THEN AND NOW**

## ***The Zionism Issue***

In preparation for the United Nations World Conference against Racism, negotiators in Geneva drafted a statement that would direct the conference proceedings in Durban. Discord ensued when Arab countries insisted that the United Nations identify Israel as a racist nation, whereas the United States and Israel threatened to boycott the conference if such a reference and judgment was made. Early in the conference, the United States and Israel did pull out of the meetings when a contentious draft resolution was issued that singled out Israel allegedly as a nation in which racism occurs. The different and politically explosive perceptions of Israel stem from different views of Zionism, the movement that led to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. As you read about Zionism, highlight words or phrases you think are essential in understanding the controversy.

### **What is Zionism?**

The Zionist movement originated in the late 19th century, when small groups of Jews persecuted in Europe began relocating to Palestine. In 1894, the trial of Alfred Dreyfus in France indirectly precipitated the development of political Zionism, a form of the movement that worked specifically for the political acknowledgment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Dreyfus was a Jewish officer in the French military who was wrongly found guilty of treason. Although he was later acquitted, the Dreyfus affair revealed that anti-Semitic sentiments were prevalent in France. Theodor Herzl, a journalist covering the story, came to the conclusion that if Jews were victimized by the educated, cosmopolitan French population, they would be victimized in any society save an autonomous Jewish nation. Many leaders in the Jewish population agreed with Herzl that the only way to ensure the Jewish community's survival and prosperity was to ensure its sovereignty. Not all Jews support political Zionism. Many adherents of Orthodox Judaism, for example, believe that Jews will recover the land of Israel only through God's work.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 gave the Zionist movement credibility in the international community. (On November 2, 1917, British foreign secretary A.J. Balfour sent a letter to Lord Rothschild, the Chair of the British Zionist Federation, in which he stated "HM government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.") The British, who controlled the Suez Canal and who had interests in India and Egypt, supported the Zionists as potential allies who might help sustain the British imperialist cause in the region. The Balfour Declaration gave support to the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the Jewish people. However, it also emphasized the protection of the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine. Some critics say that these two objectives were and are simply irreconcilable. After the First World War, Britain was given the mandate over Palestine by the League of Nations. Many Jews settled in the area during the next two decades. By 1937, however, in the face of mounting Arab opposition, Britain imposed limits on Jewish immigration. But after the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust, during which six million Jews were killed, Zionists felt even more strongly that all Jews of the world should have a safe haven in a nation of their own. In 1947, the United Nations devised a plan to divide Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state. On May 14, 1948,

the state of Israel was proclaimed. Hostilities between Israelis and Arabs immediately broke out and have continued ever since.

## **Zionism and the Arab Population**

The Zionists advocated the establishment of a Jewish nation in Palestine because of the historic link between the Jewish people and the land. According to Jewish tradition, God promised the territory to Abraham, the founder of the Jewish nation, 4000 years ago. Following the nation's exile from the land approximately 1500 years later, the Jewish people began working for a return to their homeland. Although eventually repatriated, the Jewish people continued to endure persecution under different ruling powers, and aspired to reinstate a distinctly Jewish state in Palestine. In the 19th and 20th centuries, although some early Zionists referred to Israel as "a land without a people for a people without a land," most supporters of the Zionist movement were well aware that Palestinian Arabs had been living in the Jews' ancient homeland for centuries. When groups of Jews began immigrating to Palestinian lands, however, they had few problems with the relatively small, apolitical Arab population in the area. It was only as Jewish immigration increased, becoming more of a political issue, that more confrontations with Arabs occurred. The situation has developed into a zealous and violent conflict between two peoples who consider the same land their own.

## **The Racism Allegation**

The Palestinian people denounce Israeli laws, especially citizenship laws that identify the Israeli state as a Jewish state and that they say convey special privileges on Jewish citizens. They further accuse Israel of committing inhumane acts against them in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, both by using military force and by putting into place harsh economic and physical restrictions aimed at driving them from their lands.

In 1975, the UN put forward a resolution that described Zionism as a "form of racism and racial discrimination." It was revoked in 1991. When references to Zionist racism were again brought up at the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Israel and its supporters were incensed. Here is a contentious excerpt from the draft resolution: "The World Conference recognizes with deep concern the increase of racist practices of Zionism and anti-Semitism in various parts of the world, as well as the emergence of racial and violent movements based on racism and discriminatory ideas, in particular the Zionist movement, which is based on racial superiority."

## **Follow-up Discussion**

Why is the perception or interpretation of Zionism crucial to this debate?

# **RACISM: THEN AND NOW**

## ***Reparations for Slavery***

“Reparations is saying, ‘We are sorry, we are sorry for what happened.’ . . . The language that is used is reparations, not compensation. How do you compensate me, I mean, for the loss of freedom?” — Archbishop Desmond Tutu, South African Anglican clergyman and Nobel Peace Prize laureate

“Historically, when massive injustices are committed against a group of people because of race or national origin, the society’s institutions should make restitution to the people who were harmed, including their descendants. It’s a way of making them whole again.” — Stanley Mark, program director for the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund

Examine the distinction that Desmond Tutu makes between “reparations” and “compensation.” What do you understand him to mean? As you read the following material on the reparations movement in the United States, consider how Tutu’s distinction might apply in the debate over paying money to the descendants of former slaves.

### **A Long History**

Reparations for former slaves and their families is not a new idea. In 1865, as Northern armies freed slaves from plantations in the Southern United States, the War Department authorized the grant of 40 acres of land and one mule to each family of former slaves. Although thousands of families took advantage of this offer, the majority of former slaves found this promise to be empty when President Andrew Johnson started permitting former Confederate supporters to regain possession of their property, and there was no land left to give to freed slaves. For many African Americans, the phrase “40 acres and a mule” symbolizes the first of the U.S. government’s countless broken promises for reparations. Over the course of the past 135 years, various African-American organizations have made unsuccessful attempts to obtain reparations.

Those who support reparations for the descendants of slaves in contemporary United States argue that by now, the concept of reparations is well-established and has many precedents among other groups. In 1988, for example, the United States paid over \$1-billion (US) to 80 000 Japanese Americans who were interned during the Second World War. In Canada, where 20 881 Japanese Canadians were interned in camps during the Second World War, compensation of \$21 000 for each individual directly wronged was granted by the federal government in 1988 after lengthy debate and discussion. As well, a community fund was established to rebuild the infrastructure of affected communities, and pardons were granted for those wrongfully convicted of disobeying orders under the War Measures Act, the legislation under which the internment was carried out. Canadian citizenship was also granted to those wrongfully deported to Japan, and their descendants. An additional funding program was set up for a Canadian Race Relations Foundation.

In the U.S. some argue that the situations of African Americans and Japanese Americans are distinguished by the fact that reparations in the latter case were paid to people who were immediately affected by unjust governmental practices, while reparations for slavery could obviously not benefit individuals who worked as slaves. However, proponents of reparations to African Americans contend that blacks in the United States today are in fact directly af-

ected by the legacy of slavery: while the unpaid work of their ancestors helped to make the United States a prosperous world power, the racism that was at the heart of slavery has now been transformed into a different kind of systemic racism that ensures that descendants of slaves do not share in the prosperity of the country. Before the U.S. makes plans for the future, these critics say, it must deal with the past.

## **Ambivalence**

Much controversy surrounds the issue of reparations, even among the black population in the United States. For some blacks, the question of reparations is an insult to the dignity of the African-American population, because it perpetuates the idea that blacks are victims who have made very little progress in the century since slavery was abolished. For others, the previous failures of attempts to obtain redress from the U.S. government is evidence that efforts to gain reparations are unproductive or, worse, un-American. Finally, a small body of conservative writers, both white and black, suggest that while slavery was a shameful practice, it eventually resulted in some good since, they say, blacks in the affluent United States are now better off than blacks in the poor, war-torn African nations from which many of their descendants came. Other critics would say that the latter suggestion is not only outrageous but trivializes the wrongs done as a result of slavery in the U.S.

Other arguments against reparations focus on the futility of trying to sort out guilt in a historical issue such as slavery. Some critics say that accepting that people alive today are responsible for the acts of their forebears could lead to absurd attempts to place blame for worldwide evils on various ethnic or national groups. Others suggest that if guilt can be passed down from one generation to another, then ethical merit should also be inherited. A person who has an ancestor who fought against slavery in the Civil War, for example, might not have to pay a reparations tax. In a *Washington Post* editorial, Ronald Walters proposes that many whites who oppose reparations on the grounds that guilt cannot be inherited do so simply as a means of insisting on their own decency and integrity.

But even those individuals who are willing to shoulder some of the blame, past or present, for the treatment of blacks in the United States question the value of monetary reparations for slavery. It is possible that allocating money for redress of historical wrongs would absolve white guilt without really benefitting the black population, or would actually hinder any further black attempt at calling attention to race issues. In fact, the latter situation is precisely the result hoped for by syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer, who recommends a one-time cash payment to black families on condition that race no longer be an issue in the public agenda.

Many other factors complicate the reparations campaign, including the question of who should be involved in the debate. For example, while some people argue that recent immigrants to the United States have nothing whatsoever to do with the legacy of slavery and so ought to be left out of the controversy, others insist that any non-black person benefits from the pervasive racism that relegates blacks to the bottom of society. New non-black immigrants profit from the simple fact that they are not black, while new black immigrants, even if they are not descended from slaves, are at a disadvantage. On a much larger scale, there is a question of who should pay whom, should reparations be deemed necessary. While the most obvious scenario would have the government paying individuals or families in an approach much like the one employed with Japanese Americans, other scenarios include government investment in social and educational programs that would continue to benefit future genera-

tions of blacks in the United States, or corporate payments to descendants of slaves from organizations whose wealth was attained partly through slave labour.

## Reflection

Reread the reasons given for and against the payment of reparations to the descendants of slaves in the U.S. Explain why this is an emotionally charged debate.

## An Ongoing Issue

Another model of restitution involves reparations not only for the descendants of slaves, but also for the countries from which slaves were taken. At the anti-racism conference in Durban, African countries sought to obtain European countries' acknowledgment of slavery as a crime against humanity as well as financial redress for the slave trade. European countries rejected both these demands. They maintained that the slave trade could not be classified as a crime against humanity, since it was acceptable under customary international law of the time. They also argued that no monetary restitution is due to African nations since slavery was not a colonial imposition on Africa, but rather an African concept that was emulated by the colonial powers.

It is true that slavery existed and continues to exist on the African continent. Historical accounts describe slavery in many countries of the world, even among people who were subsequently taken as slaves themselves. One of the most famous slave narratives, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, is often studied because it includes a portrait of African life prior to the European slave trade. It begins with a reference to African slavery: "My father, besides many slaves, had a numerous family. . . ." And the slave trade does continue in some countries today. Some of the most startling testimonies at the Durban anti-racism conference came from people who had escaped life as modern-day slaves. It is difficult to estimate how many individuals are still trapped in slavery today, since some countries officially outlaw the practice even while it goes on in segments of their population.

In the final statement of the conference the delegates agreed on a text ". . . that acknowledges and profoundly regrets the massive human sufferings and the tragic plight of millions of men, women, and children as a result of slavery, slave trade, transatlantic slave trade, apartheid, colonialism, and genocide." Acknowledging that these were "appalling tragedies in the history of humanity," the Conference "further acknowledged that slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade."

## Discussion

1. In your opinion, does the existence of slavery in Africa today dismiss European countries' culpability in the Western slave trade that ended in the 19th century? Why or why not? Write a two-page response.
2. The official Canadian government delegation to the Durban conference made it clear that financial reparations for slavery were not on their agenda. Part of Canada's submission to the conference read: "We need to consider a diversity lens approach when formulating policy. We should focus on innovative, forward-looking, multi-dimensional, holistic, and appropriate redress and remedies that will lead beyond reconciliation to enable and empower all women and men to participate fully and equally in society." Highlight the significant words and phrases in this excerpt. Express in your own words what you think this statement is saying.

## **RACISM: THEN AND NOW**

### ► ***The Nova Scotia Experience***

The first black settlers arrived in Nova Scotia in the 18th century. Many of them were former slaves who won their freedom by fighting for the British during the American War of Independence. They came to Canada with the British Loyalists and were promised free land upon their arrival in Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, members of this group, as well as other former slaves who subsequently came to Nova Scotia, were often exploited by the wealthier British majority, who made them tenant farmers. Some blacks sought to establish their own communities. Two of the largest communities were Preston, on the outskirts of Halifax, and Africville, at the north end of the city.

Founded in the early 19th century, Africville was a close-knit community with its own school, church, and stores. However, it lacked the services that the city of Halifax provided to other residents, including water or sewage facilities, and emergency services. More than that, the city installed in the area potentially harmful facilities that would not be tolerated in other areas of Halifax, such as an infectious diseases hospital and the city dump. By the 1960s, Africville was the largest black ghetto in Canada. Africville was considered a filthy shanty quarter and an eyesore.

It was hardly surprising, then, when the city of Halifax sought to have Africville destroyed. In the mid 1960s, against their wishes, the residents of Africville were moved into public housing. The experience was made even more humiliating when their possessions were moved by garbage trucks, since the employees of moving companies would not load or transport property from what they perceived as an unclean neighbourhood. Buildings in Africville were demolished without the consent of community members. To avoid objections from the residents, the Seaview African Baptist Church was demolished at nighttime, when most people were sleeping.

Today, former residents of Africville are seeking some form of compensation for the loss of their houses, their land, and their community. Although plans for the future of Africville vary, most former residents would like to have some elements of the former Africville restored. Some suggest that the community church be rebuilt along with a new interpretive centre that would serve to tell the story of blacks in Nova Scotia, with a special focus on Africville.

### **Activities**

Nova Scotia has had to deal with racial tensions in the province. For example, violence linked to race broke out at the Halifax-area Cole Harbour District High School during the 1990s. (See “Cole Harbour: A Racial Divide,” December 1997, *News in Review*.) Unfortunately, these incidents were perhaps only unique in the amount of publicity they received. What may have received less media coverage was an event that occurred during the summer of 2001. In the weeks before the United Nations anti-racism summit in Durban, the black community in Nova Scotia hosted its own symposium on racism, themed “Racism and the Black World Response.” Examine the rationale and program for this symposium at its Web site ([www.dal.ca/~jrjchair/symp/invite.htm](http://www.dal.ca/~jrjchair/symp/invite.htm)) as well as the subsequent Halifax Declaration of Principles and Priorities.

# **RACISM: THEN AND NOW**

## ***Dealing with the Past***

Many Canadians consider their country a culturally heterogeneous society where harmony between different groups is a social priority. Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, many Canadians assumed that non-English and especially non-European ethnic groups would be assimilated by the dominant “Canadian” culture—the latter a problematic definition in itself. Reflecting what today is recognized clearly as ethnocentricity, it was a common assumption in Canada that European practices, especially Anglo-Saxon ones, were preferable to the customs of other cultures. Unfortunately, numerous events in Canadian history demonstrate what many would classify as xenophobic or racist policies on the part of Canadian governments; policies aimed at establishing and preserving a homogeneous Canadian culture based on Anglo-Saxon values.

### **Residential Schools**

The development of residential schools for Aboriginal people in Canada was a joint undertaking of three groups, each with different goals. The federal government was interested in schooling Aboriginals because it wanted to Canadianize them; Christian denominations got involved in teaching Aboriginal Canadians because they wanted to convert them; and certain Aboriginal groups supported the idea of schools based on European cultural values because they wanted their children to adjust to a European-style economy. Soon, the scheme proved to be detrimental to First Nations culture. While original plans for an Aboriginal education system involved on-reserve schools, officials quickly decided that they could best assimilate Aboriginal children by keeping them away from their parents. Moreover, many former students reported traumatic experiences—in particular physical and sexual abuse—in the residential schools.

### **Chinese Head Taxes**

Many Chinese immigrants began arriving in Canada in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when gold prospectors from California moved north during the Fraser River gold rush. In the early 1880s, approximately 15 000 Chinese came to Canada to work on the Canadian Pacific Railway. Since Chinese workers were given the most dangerous jobs, many of them died during the construction of the railway. After the railway was completed in 1885, many Canadians no longer wanted Chinese people in Canada, and the Canadian government introduced a “head tax” that Chinese immigrants had to pay in order to enter the country. The tax was originally set at \$50, but was increased as prejudice against the Chinese escalated. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when certain companies outraged Canadians by employing Chinese and Japanese men to work as strike breakers, the Chinese head tax rose to \$500. In 1923, legislation was introduced that made it nearly impossible for Chinese immigrants to enter the country. The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed in the 1940s.

### **Japanese Internment Camps**

Japanese immigrants first came to Canada at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when overcrowded conditions in Japanese villages meant there was no work for many people. Most of the young fishers and farmers who came to British Columbia from Japan worked in the province’s fishing industry. The residents of British Columbia, however, resented the boatloads of immi-

grants arriving in Canada. Restrictions were placed on the number of Japanese who could come to Canada, and limits were imposed on the number of fishing licences that would be granted to them. During the Second World War, after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the Canadian government ordered Japanese Canadians living along the coast of British Columbia to be relocated, even though the majority of them were in fact Canadian nationals. In 1942, over 20 000 Japanese Canadians were removed from their homes; they ended up in detention camps in the interior of British Columbia or on sugar beet farms in Manitoba and Alberta. It took until 1949 for the Japanese Canadians to regain freedom. In 1988, the government of Brian Mulroney passed legislation granting individuals affected by injustices committed during the Second World War \$21 000 in compensation.

## **German Enemy Aliens**

Prior to the First World War, German Canadians lived in harmony with other citizens of the country. With the advent of war, however, many German-Canadians' allegiances were questioned. To make matters worse, Canadians became suspicious of Germans and accused members of the group of spying for Germany. Many Canadians boycotted German-run businesses, and some even vandalized property owned by German Canadians. The Canadian government passed legislation that identified the German Canadians as enemy aliens who would be denied certain rights, such as the right to speak in their mother tongue in meetings and to vote. These restrictions were finally repealed in 1920.

## **Jews in Canada**

Anti-Jewish sentiment has been a significant problem in Canada and part of mainstream attitudes. A 1905 speech in Parliament by the prominent politician and journalist Henri Bourassa urged Canada to shut its doors to Jewish immigrants. Such organizations as the Social Credit Party, the Orange Order, and the Native Sons of Canada were rife with anti-Semitism, and for Jews in Canada, quotas and restrictions were a way of life. In the 1920s and 1930s, they were not hired in many industries and were discriminated against in educational institutions. It was difficult for a Jewish doctor to get a hospital appointment, and Jewish lawyers were excluded from most law firms. Many other professionals had to hide their Jewishness in order to get ahead in their chosen field. Private clubs refused entry to Jews, and even cottage country businesses turned them away. Most troubling perhaps is the fact that Canada had the worst record of any Western nation or country of immigration for accepting Jews escaping Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

## **Racial Segregation**

Some Canadians are surprised to learn that the Ku Klux Klan operated in Canada; they even wore a maple leaf on their robes to mark their patriotism. Although the presence of the KKK in Canada was small, policies of racial discrimination were prevalent. Carol Aylward, now a law professor at Dalhousie University, remembers her first day of school, when she was the first non-white student at the institution. Until the 1960s segregated schools still existed in a few communities in Canada.

## **► Follow-up Discussion**

Why is it important to remember injustices that occurred in Canada in the past? How might examining such historical issues help prevent history from repeating itself?

# **RACISM: THEN AND NOW**

## ***Facing the Present***

It is no doubt easier to identify instances of racism in the past or in other countries than it is to recognize racism in our own society today. While racism in years gone by or in faraway places can be attributed to outmoded philosophies and peculiar ideas, racism in contemporary Canada goes against the general view of our country as a multicultural state, and perhaps against our view of ourselves as multicultural citizens. As you read the following information, consider whether it influences your ideas and opinions about what it means to be Canadian.

### **Aboriginal Canadians**

Canada consistently ranks at the top of 174 countries in the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI). However, if only Aboriginal Canadians were rated in the index, which looks at life expectancy, education, and income, they would rank almost halfway down the list. The quality of life for Aboriginals, then, is much lower than that for other Canadians. The Canadian Race Relations Foundation offers the following statistics on the living conditions of Aboriginals in Canada:

- Over half of Aboriginal children in Canada live in poverty.
- The disability rate among Aboriginals is at least double the national average.
- The unemployment rate among Aboriginal Canadians is four times the national average.

Matthew Coon Come, the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, asserts that Canada is systemically racist in its treatment of Aboriginal Canadians. He says that government policies directly contribute to further devastation of Aboriginal peoples.

### **Immigrants**

Dr. Michael Ornstein, director of the Institute for Social Research at York University in Toronto, studied poverty among immigrants in Canada's largest city in 2000. He found that up to 40 per cent of immigrants who are visible minorities live in poverty, compared with only 10 per cent of white immigrants. The Urban Alliance on Race Relations blames these huge inequalities on cutbacks in welfare, new immigrant, and employment equity programs in the recent past, and says that without specific policies in place to help newcomers to Canada obtain stable employment for which they are qualified, the racism of Canadian society ensures that black immigrants are especially likely to get stuck in low-paying jobs.

### **A Subtly Racist Society**

In August 2001, the Human Rights Tribunal found that Health Canada was guilty of discrimination against Shiv Chopra, a 32-year employee in Health Canada's Bureau of Veterinary Drugs. Chopra claimed that he did not receive a promotion to a managerial position because of his ethnicity. The tribunal discovered that the bureau Chopra worked for even made changes to their evaluations of him in order to cover up their actions. According to Chopra, racism in Canada is not overt: "The kind of racism that we face here is not the kind of street racism where people call names. . . . This is boardroom racism." Many analysts of race issues comment on the subtle racism that permeates Canadian businesses and institutions.

## Hope for the Future

In trying to understand and confront racism, one can become discouraged by the many examples of discrimination that remain in contemporary society. However, it is important to keep in mind the numerous changes for the better that have occurred in the recent past and that continue to develop.

Even the recent World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, fraught with controversy as it was, did take steps toward positive change. Amnesty International reminds its supporters of specific successes achieved at the conference: “For the first time, the plight of groups such as Dalits, Roma, Tibetans, indigenous people, those who face multiple forms of discrimination, such as refugees, women or gays and lesbians, and those living under occupation, has been put forcefully on the world agenda.” No matter how modest, each small victory counts.

Statistical data suggest that the black population in the U.S. has made large improvements in its position. In *America in Black and White: One Nation, Indivisible*, Stephan Thernstrom and Abigail Thernstrom show that the African-American presence in white-collar occupations increased fourfold from 1950 to 1990, and that income as a percentage of white income increased 24 per cent between 1967 and 1990. Statistics from Canada also reveal changes for the better. Many observers agree that immigration policies have improved over the past several decades, resulting in an increase in non-European presence in this country. In 1971, for example, only five per cent of the Canadian population was of a non-European background. The number increased to 11 per cent by 1996, and estimates for the next 25 years put the figure at over 20 per cent in the near future. Studies suggest an increasing tolerance for minority groups. Reginald Bibby, a professor of Sociology at the University of Lethbridge and an expert on social trends in Canada, has found that approval of intermarriage rose from 57 per cent in 1975 to 81 per cent in 1995. A 1991 Angus Reid poll found that the majority of Canadians support government policy that actively helps minority groups by providing assistance to minority organizations and developing school resources to promote diversity.

## Follow-up Discussion

Evolving as a pluralistic society, Canada has come a long way. One only has to look at the role models at the highest levels of government, business, and other public institutions who represent the multicultural nation that Canada is today. As a class, brainstorm a list of such prominent Canadians. Despite our progress, however, racism is a social ill that must constantly be monitored. How, for example, can our educational systems combat racism and celebrate our diversity at the same time?

# RACISM: THEN AND NOW

## *Discussion, Research, and Essay Questions*

- 1. The United Nations' Web site includes a section that paraphrases the core treaties of that organization in uncomplicated English. Visit the site ([www0.un.org/cyberschoolbus/treaties/index.asp](http://www0.un.org/cyberschoolbus/treaties/index.asp)), and review the treaty on the elimination of racial discrimination. Summarize the key points in your own words.
- 2. Prepare a report on one aspect of the present-day Arab-Israeli conflict. You can begin with *News in Review* stories such as "Arab Revolt: Israeli Political Upheaval" (March 2001) or "Israel 2000: A New Middle East?" (April 1999).
- 3. Research the term *environmental racism*. How does it apply to Africville? You can find out more about that community by watching the National Film Board's *Remember Africville*, or by reading *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community*, by Donald H. Clairmont and Dennis William Magill.
- 4. Read George Elliott Clarke's play *Beatrice Chancy*, or watch the video *One Heart Broken Into Song* (for which Clarke was the scriptwriter). Write a review of the play or the movie, commenting on its depiction of different black experiences in Nova Scotia.
- 5. Read one of the following books about the "hyphenated Canadian" experience: Japanese Canadian: *Obasan, Itsuka*, or *Naomi's Road* (ages 8-12), by Joy Kogawa, or *Chorus of Mushrooms*, by Hiromi Goto; Chinese Canadian: *Disappearing Moon Cafe*, by Sky Lee, or *The Jade Peony*, by Wayson Choy; Aboriginal Canadian: *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* or *Caribou Song* (children's picture book), by Tomson Highway, or *Green Grass, Running Water*, by Thomas King; Black Canadian: *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, by Dionne Brand, or *Childhood*, by Andre Alexis. Write a book report that explains how the text you have chosen depicts life between cultures, and whether or not this is an important aspect of the book's value.
- 6. Canada is home to people from over 150 different ethnic, linguistic, and racial backgrounds. Find out more about a specific cultural group in Canada. Prepare a report to share with the rest of your class.
- 7. Use newspapers to look for examples of hate and tolerance in the world. Compare and contrast the issues involved.
- 8. By accessing the Racism Conference's Web site at [www.un.org/WCAR/](http://www.un.org/WCAR/), prepare an oral report to the class in which you give an overview of one of the five key issues of the conference. Define that issue in your own words and clearly show why it was determined that it should be on the agenda of this conference.